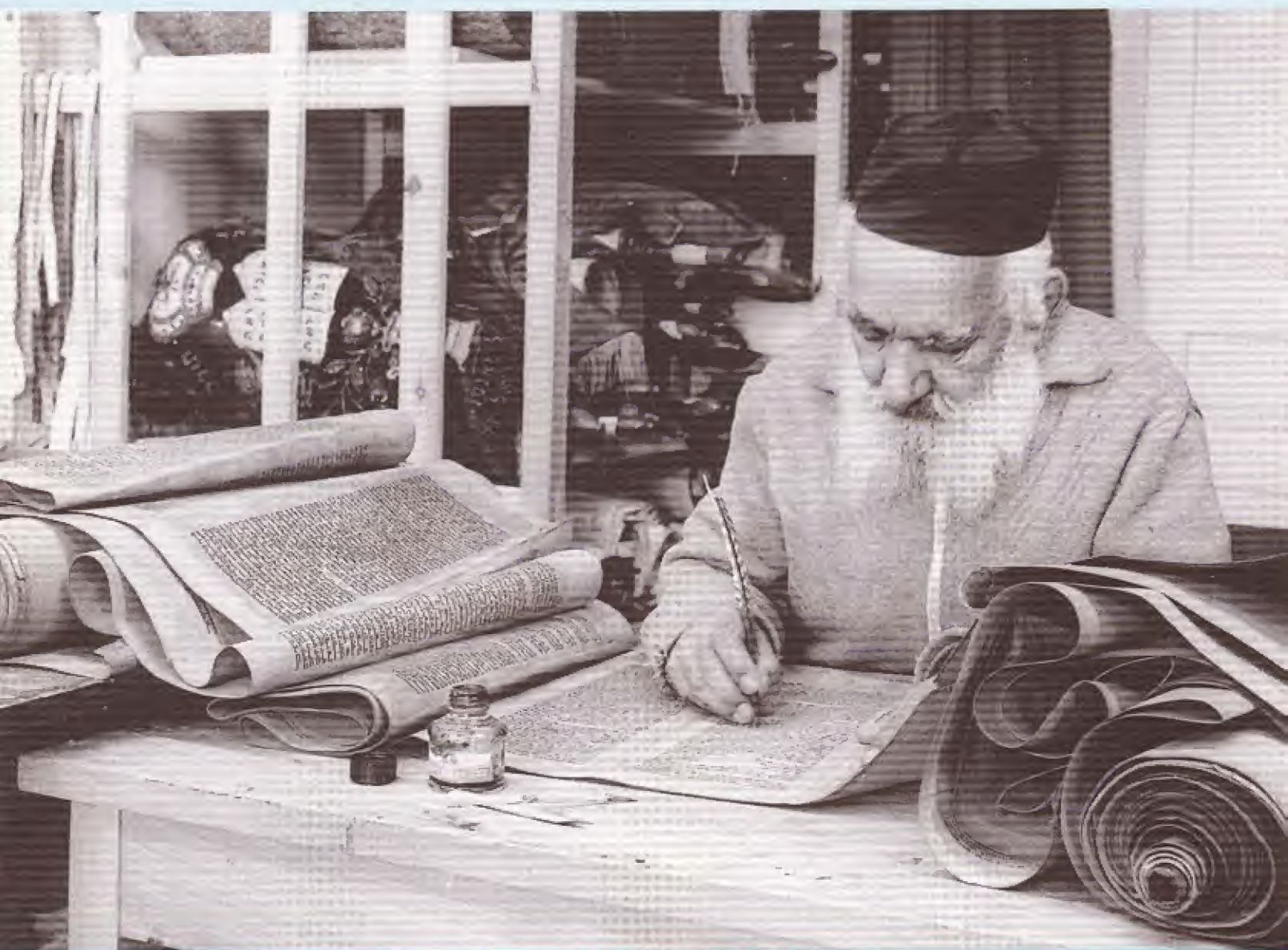


January/February 1992
Volume 5, Number 1

מנקודת ראות ירושלמית

Jerusalem Perspective

Exploring the Jewish Background to the Life and Words of Jesus



Randall Buth **Inspiration, History and Bible Translation**

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There is something scary in the suggestion that there may be an additional Gospel. The canon of Scripture is, after all, complete. And I hope you don't suggest otherwise.

— Paul Hunt,
Stone Mountain,
Georgia, U.S.A.

David Bivin responds:

We Christian members of the Jerusalem School certainly do believe the canon of Scripture is complete. The School's Jewish members also think it is complete, but for them, of course, it was completed long before the books of the New Testament were written.

None of the School's members would want to suggest that the Hebrew gospel, which according to church tradition was written by the apostle Matthew, should be added to the canon. In any event, this book doesn't exist. Although one occasionally hears rumors of the discovery of a portion of the New Testament written in Hebrew or Aramaic, to date there is not a single extant Hebrew-language manuscript from the early Christian era of any of the New Testament books. The Hebrew gospel that Matthew is reported to have written is apparently another of the many Jewish books that were lost in the destruction of the Second Jewish Commonwealth.

While the scholars of the Jerusalem School have concluded that the first account of Jesus' life was written in Hebrew, probably by one of Jesus' original disciples, they recognize that all the books of the canonical New Testament, including the synoptic Gospels, were written in Greek. The existence of an early Hebrew life of Jesus can at this time be nothing more than conjecture. On the other hand, study has consistently shown the importance of recognizing the profoundly Jewish background of the Gospels, and the Jerusalem School firmly believes that a Hebraic perspective is the key to a better understanding of these documents.

The scholars of the Jerusalem School do not believe that the conjectured Hebrew gospel of Matthew can ever be reconstructed with one hundred percent accuracy. Probably none of the canonical Gospels has preserved all the stories that were in Matthew's Hebrew gospel. For example, the parable of the prodigal son appears only in Luke's Gospel. If we assume that this parable was part of the original Hebrew composition and that all or some of the other writers of New Testament Gospels knew a Greek form of it, then these other writers have chosen to omit the parable from their accounts.

Nor is it likely that Luke copied all the stories he found in his sources. Luke's Gospel does not contain stories such as Matthew's parables of the hidden treasure, the pearl, the dragnet, the unmerciful servant, the laborers in the vine-

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Jerusalem Perspective

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Subscriptions

One year: £18 – US\$36 – NIS72 in Israel. **Two years:** £30 – US\$60 – NIS120. **Three years:** £37.50 – US\$75 – NIS150.

Gift subscriptions — For first: £15 – US\$30 – NIS60. **For each additional:** £12.50 – US\$25 – NIS50.

Back issues — October 1987–May 1989 (monthly issues) are £1 – US\$2 – NIS4 each. July/August 1989 and following (bimonthly issues) are £2.50 – US\$5 – NIS10.

Jerusalem Perspective accepts payment in the following currencies: Israeli shekel; pound sterling; United States, Canadian, Australian or New Zealand dollar; French, Swiss or Belgian franc; Norwegian or Danish krone; Swedish krona; Dutch florin; Austrian schilling; German mark; Finnish markka; Italian lira; S. African rand; Greek drachma; Spanish peseta; Japanese yen. Prices

include airmail postage. Prices in Israeli shekels apply to delivery in Israel only.

Payment may be made by money order, bank draft or personal check, but must be in the local currency of the bank on which the check is drawn. Checks should be made payable to "Jerusalem Perspective."

Jerusalem Perspective is indexed in *New Testament Abstracts*, *Religious and Theological Abstracts*, *Elenchus Bibliographicus Biblicus* and *International Zeitschriftenschatz für Bibelwissenschaft und Grenzgebiete*.

Printed in Israel. ISSN 0792-1357

Articles printed in **Jerusalem Perspective** express the views of their authors, and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Publisher, Editor or members of the Jerusalem School of Synoptic Research. Advertising does not necessarily imply editorial endorsement.

P.O. Box 31820
91317 Jerusalem
Israel

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Modern scribe
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Torah scroll.
(Courtesy of the Israel
Government Press Office)*

Inspiration, History and Bible Translation

Dr. Buth continues his **מִתְּרַגְּמָן** (*me-tur-ge-MAN*, translator) series of articles for Bible translators, showing how a knowledge of the Gospels' Semitic background can enhance the translation process.

by Randall Buth

What kind of book is the Bible? It claims to be inspired by God, but what does that mean for believers in general, for researchers and for Bible translators? Such questions are raised whenever the Bible is examined against the available background of its culture, language and history. I will address the question of inspiration from the perspective of a translator, because it puts me in a middle ground between researchers and general readers.

Before proceeding, however, I must point out that the scholars of the Jerusalem School of Synoptic Research comprise both Jews and Christians, and even we Christians are not agreed on all points of theology. Some of the School's research strengthens what most Christians have believed about the Bible, while some of it raises questions, both new and old. Readers are advised to examine the Bible carefully like the Bereans of old (Acts 17:11).

Background

In the second century, differences among the four Gospels led Tatian to produce a Gospel harmony in Syriac which became the preferred text in many eastern churches in the second to fourth centuries. However the church at large, and the eastern churches in the fifth century, have agreed that God has sovereignly given us the four Gospels, and that they are to be accepted as the rule or canon of the church, including any difficulties.

Our own generation has produced many perspectives on biblical inspiration, as can be seen in such diverse books as *The Battle for the Bible* (1976) by Harold Lindsell, *Fundamentalism* (1978) by James Barr, and *The Scripture Principle* (1984) by Clark Pinnock. Problems of definition and understanding continue. About the only consensus today among

the various theological perspectives is that the Bible was not dictated — the human individuality of the various authors of Scripture was not violated.

Two passages will illustrate testimony from the Bible itself: "...and scripture cannot be annulled" (Jn. 10:35); "...all scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching...and instruction in righteousness" (II Tim. 3:16). While these passages lay the groundwork for authority and trustworthiness, they do not address the questions of the relationship between the human writer and the Holy Spirit nor do they specify to what level of detail inspiration would guarantee the "facts" of a statement, if at all.

Inspiration to the Ancients

What does inspiration imply? Many ancients considered that inspiration provided a text pregnant with hidden meanings lurking beneath the surface. The rabbis generally accepted both the surface "literal" meaning, the **פְּשָׁט** (*pe-SHAT*), as well as extended meanings, sometimes called **דְּרָשָׁה** (*de-RASH*). On the other hand, some early Christian interpreters explicitly denied the literal meaning. Notice how the author of the Epistle of Barnabas (90–130 A.D.) condemns Jews for following the Scriptures literally and calls the non-literal meaning "spiritual":

When Moses said, "You shall not eat a pig, vulture, hawk, raven or any fish which has no scales" [Lev. 11, Deut. 14], he had in mind three doctrines. Additionally he says to them in Deuteronomy, "And I will make a covenant of my ordinances with this people." Therefore the ordinance of God is not abstinence from eating, but Moses spoke in the spirit. He mentioned the pig because he means that we should not associate with people who are like pigs, who when they have plenty forget the Lord, but when they are in want recognize the Lord.... "Neither shall you eat the



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vulture, hawk, kite or raven." You should not, he means, attach yourself to or become like people who [as these birds] do not know how to get their food by their labor and sweat, but in their iniquity plunder other people's property.... "You shall not eat the lamprey, polypus or cuttlefish." You should not, he means, associate with or become like people who are utterly ungodly and who are already condemned to death just as these fish alone are accursed, and float in the deep water, not swimming like the others but living on the floor of the sea.... Moses received three doctrines concerning food and thus spoke of them in the Spirit; but they received them as really referring to food, owing to the lust of the flesh.... See how well Moses legislated. But how was it possible for them to understand or comprehend these things? But we, having a righteous understanding of them, announce the commandments as the Lord wished. For this reason he circumcised our hearing and our hearts so that we should comprehend these things. (Epistle of Barnabas 10:1-12)

"Research can help the believer understand the Bible where details of culture, language or history are needed to fully grasp a particular verse or passage."

Also, some Jewish scholars showed inconsistency when they only adopted certain books into the canon after interpreting them in a non-literal sense. "Originally Proverbs, Song of Songs and Ecclesiastes were suppressed. Since they were held to be mere parables and not part of the Scriptures, they

[the religious authorities] suppressed them. So they remained until the people of the Great Assembly interpreted them [in a spiritual sense]" (Avot de-Rabbi Natan 1).

Most scholars across the theological spectrum today would reject such non-literal views of interpretation. Two philosophical approaches are possible towards finding a definition: idealistic or empirical. Some have argued that a perfect God would inspire a "perfect" document. Within such an idealistic approach one must continually redefine "perfect" to fit the data of the text. An empirical approach would examine the texts that we have and let our observations of the texts inform our definition of inspiration and its implications.

Research Can Support Bible

Research can help the believer understand the Bible where details of culture, language or history are needed to fully grasp a particu-

lar verse or passage. In many cases this not only increases one's understanding, it also increases one's confidence in the reliability of Scripture. Examples of this are scattered throughout studies related to the Bible. For example, previously in this column (Mar/Apr 1990) we discussed why and how Jesus used the title "Son of Man," which reinforces what a Christian may expect to find in the Gospel records. Similarly, the articles by Mendel Nun in JERUSALEM PERSPECTIVE showed how the Gospels agree with what is known about ancient fishing, and even provide details that add to our historical knowledge of the period.

As other examples, Adolf Deissman and James Moulton showed that despite Semitic coloring, the New Testament was written in an acceptable, non-literary Greek, and William Ramsey showed that Luke was a reliable historian.

In our century, discoveries of texts in neighboring Semitic languages have shown that many irregularities in the Hebrew Bible are archaic features of the language and not corruptions. The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls confirmed that the traditional Hebrew text was at least 1000 years older than had been previously supposed, although the scrolls have also added new difficulties to textual questions. In addition, the Dead Sea Scrolls have greatly helped to reveal the complexity of Judaism in the first century, and unexpectedly confirmed such things as the Jewishness of the Gospel of John. Lindsey and Flusser's theories on synoptic origins (Lukan-proto-Matthean priority) promise a more precise knowledge of the meaning and formation of our Gospels.

Pure History & Literary Stylizing

It is important to recognize that it is legitimate to distinguish between the historical background and the literary shaping of a passage.

There are many instances in the Gospels where events are reported in two or more different ways. Sometimes this may have been caused by reporting more than one historical event. Many of Jesus' sayings were undoubtedly spoken on more than one occasion, which might help to account for instances where the wording of one Gospel differs from another.

Some events only happened once — at least the probability of the events happening twice is so slim that it should be ignored, especially if the only evidence of two almost identical events is the fact that one Gospel has a slightly different wording from another. The following three examples of such singular events will help to illustrate this.

The Voice at Jesus' Baptism

Matthew 3:17 records the phrase "This is my Son...", while Luke 3:22 gives "You are my Son." In Greek, Hebrew, Aramaic or English one can say something in either the second person, "you," or in the third person, "he/this" — but no form is available for both. If the voice was heard in one of those languages, then originally it was either second person or third person. A researcher wants to know which was the original. He may not get a reliable answer, but the question is valid. On the other hand, the church has accepted both as true: a voice came from heaven announcing that Jesus was God's Son. Matthew records this from the perspective of the people and phrases this statement in the third person. Luke records this from the perspective of Jesus and phrases the statement in the second person.

Theoretically, another view is possible. We could invoke a second miracle on top of the miraculous voice: perhaps God's voice was third person to the audience and second person to Jesus. This sort of explanation was acceptable in ancient Jewish circles. A rabbinic sermon (midrash) to Exodus 4:27 contains the following account:

"And the LORD said to Aaron, 'Go to meet Moses in the wilderness.'" This is where "God thunders miracles with his voice" [Job 37:5] applies.... Rabbi Reuven said: "At the time that God said to Moses in Midian, 'Go, return to Egypt,' the voice divided into two voices and two personalities. While Moses was hearing in Midian, 'Go return to Egypt,' Aaron was hearing, 'Go meet Moses in the desert!'" (Exodus Rabbah 5:9)

Such an explanation could be brought forward for Matthew and Luke, though neither record two simultaneous miracles and it is not a very satisfying explanation for someone who wants to understand the plain sense of each book. A definition of inspiration is needed that will include both Matthew's and Luke's accounts as true, or as part of God's Word, even though a historian might still wonder which version was original.

Did He Say "Good Teacher"?

In Matthew 19:16–30, Mark 10:17–31 and Luke 18:18–30 there is the story of a man asking Jesus a question about inheriting eternal life. This story follows the "blessing of the children" in all three Gospels, and each account clearly refers to the same event. In Mark and Luke the man addresses Jesus, "**Good teacher,** what must I do..." while in Matthew he says, "**Teacher,** what good thing must I do..."

One solution is to accept both versions and to recognize that each Gospel writer shaped the material for his presentation. But a researcher still may legitimately ask which form was original. The man either said "Good teacher, what..." or "Teacher, what good thing..."

This is the sort of issue that is repeatedly raised by research into the synoptic Gospels. Scholars want to understand the history of the Gospels, and they may reach conclusions about which Gospel preserves the "correct" version and which is "secondary." However, the church can still accept both accounts as true reflections of Jesus' life and teaching.

Incidentally, the scholars in Jerusalem have debated these passages extensively. Most think that a Jew would never have addressed a teacher as "Good teacher," while others think that the very uniqueness and "impossibility" of the phrase argues for its originality. We do not have absolute certainty on the matter. What is important is for readers to let both accounts teach them about Jesus, and to recognize the kind of questions that scholars sometimes try to answer.

Which Chronology is Right?

Another example of the difference between a Gospel as a "perfect tape-recording" and as a stylized history comes from the different versions of the Temple cleansing in Matthew and Mark. In Matthew 21:12–19, Jesus enters the Temple and drives out the moneychangers, and then the next day he curses a fig tree. In Mark 11:11–19, Jesus looks around the Temple but leaves, only returning the next day to drive the moneychangers out of the Temple after cursing a fig tree.

There are two ways to deal with this problem. One would be to suppose that Jesus "cleansed" the Temple twice, once before the fig-tree incident as in Matthew, and once after it as in Mark. The problem with that is two-fold. First, no Gospel writer says that there were two cleansings. The double occurrence is only a result of comparing two accounts and trying to make them both answer every chronological question put to the text. Second, Mark actually places Jesus in the Temple the night before the fig-tree incident but reports only that Jesus "looked around," not that he "cleansed" the Temple, which contradicts Matthew's chronology.

On the other hand, if we assume that Matthew knew Mark's text, then he knew what he was doing when he purposefully chose the order in which he told the stories. Matthew was not interested in following Mark's chronology,

perhaps because he thought that Mark had stylized the account, or at least he felt that he had the right to make changes. At the same time if one reader only read Matthew and another reader only read Mark, they would definitely come to contradictory conclusions as to the order of events.

The Need for Flexibility

The examples above lead us to a firm conclusion that one cannot indiscriminately ask any kind of historical question of any Gospel text and get an absolute answer. The purpose of a Gospel writer was not to record every detail in an exact chronology, and some kind of literary license must be permitted in one's view of how God has inspired the Bible. Theologians differ on what kind and how much literary license there is.

Evangelical Christian scholars have debated terminology about whether God's inspiration implies "inerrancy," "limited inerrancy" or "infallibility." These terms were developed in order to reinforce the Bible's authority and reliability for the church, while at the same time discussing the implications of the doctrine of inspiration for the factuality of any passage. Some scholars used "limited inerrancy" and "infallibility" to allow room for discrepancies or errors at one level, while maintaining trustworthiness within a broader perspective. Others, like Clark Pinnock, have argued that "inerrancy" is an adequate term as it stands but needs to be defined properly to allow flexibility.

Several years ago John Beekman, the translation coordinator for Wycliffe Bible Translators, suggested using a term like "functional inerrancy" since there are always problems that we cannot understand. Theoretically, it might be easy to opt for "inerrancy" and provide a water-tight philosophical argument for the total reliability of Scripture on every detail. Pragmatically, however, this is more difficult for those, such as translators, who have to deal with the details of the text. Definitions must be expanded to account for the various purposes of Scripture. It was for such people and such difficulties that John Beekman wrote the following:

Low probability solutions [to Bible difficulties] give the impression that inerrancy stands or falls upon the eventual success of explaining these remaining problems. Would it not be better to shift the focus to the inconsequential nature of these remaining problems and emphasize that each is functionally inerrant even apart from final explanations? (*Notes on Translation* 68 [1978], 13)

This approach preserves the word "inerrant," although it admits that the thrust of a text, that is, its function and purposes of communication, may lie elsewhere than in the consistency of all details.

Inspiration, Canon & Church

Another approach to inspiration is to consider God's acting with his people in history. God has acted on behalf of a people, first Israel and then also those whom he "grafted into" the ideal son of Israel, Jesus the Messiah. These communities of faith have recorded God's actions and their own actions, and they have believed that God has communicated to them through special spokesmen. For both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament, there was a formative period of several hundred years during which the community and its leaders considered which books should form God's standard rule or canon for the community.

To believe in the Christian Bible, therefore, is also to believe in God's working through the church, and to believe in the church is also to believe in its constitutional documents, the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament.

At a minimum, the Bible is inspired by God in that it is the authoritative product of those groups that God raised up and nurtured. Such an approach might consider questions of inerrancy to be irrelevant. The Bible is the document that God has given the church through a long and varied process. As far as a Bible passage gives the church an understanding of God and his relationship to his creatures, it is inspired, "inerrant" and true. One basic principle is that every passage must be allowed to speak for itself, and it must also be integrated within the whole of Scripture.

Bible Translation

A Bible translator may partially evade the discussions and questions above. It is impossible to translate what one does not understand, so he must listen to scholars and ask many questions about the exact meaning of a text. In the cases above ("voice," "teacher," "Temple-cleansing"), a translator cannot answer the historical questions. Instead, he clearly sees the differences in the way Matthew, Mark or Luke have presented a story, and he must translate each Gospel as it stands without harmonization.

Robert Lindsey and David Flusser have suggested (*Jesus, Rabbi & Lord*, pp. 131–134) that the Hebrew saying behind Luke 12:50 would have had an active meaning — "I have a baptism to baptize with." This parallels the active "cast fire" in the previous verse in which Jesus

says, "I came to cast fire on the earth." But the Greek words in Luke are in a passive form: "I have a baptism to **be baptized** with," and at this point the translator of Luke must part ways with a possible historical reconstruction and follow Luke's text. The suggestion may be right historically, but the canon that God has given the church is different.

Hypothetical Example

What would happen if a copy of a Hebrew source to the synoptic Gospels was found? The scholars of the Jerusalem School think that it would substantiate the same view of Jesus that is already in the synoptic Gospels, but would show differences of order and detail. If such a document were found and verified to have been a source for the Gospels, historians would likely treat it with higher respect than the canonical Gospels. That would present a question for the church: do we include such a text in the Bible and follow its details as Scripture?

Personally, I doubt that the churches of the twentieth century would fully canonize such a document, although it might revolutionize study of the Gospels. We do not replace Matthew with Mark even though most scholars consider Mark as a source used by Matthew. Mark helps us understand Matthew's purposes better, and in the same way a Hebrew source to the synoptics would help us understand the Gospels better.

Perhaps another rabbinic story will help illustrate the church's attachment to the canonical Gospels and God's having historically limited himself to them, whether or not new information comes to light.

On that day Rabbi Eliezer used every possible argument to substantiate his opinion but his colleagues remained unconvinced. Then he said to them, "If the halachah is according to my opinion, let this carob tree prove it." The carob tree was uprooted and moved fifty meters.... "No proof can be brought from a carob tree," they replied. Then he said to them, "If the halachah is according to my opinion, let this aqueduct prove it." The water in the aqueduct flowed backwards. "No proof can be brought from an aqueduct," they replied. Then he said to them, "If the halachah is according to my opinion, let the walls of this house of study prove it." The walls of the house of study began to lean. But Rabbi Yehoshua rebuked them [the walls], "If scholars of the Torah are engaged in a halachic dispute, why do you [the walls] have to interfere?" They did not fall, out of respect for Rabbi Yehoshua, nor did they resume their upright position, out of respect for Rabbi Eliezer, but continued to lean.

Then Rabbi Eliezer said to them, "If the halachah is according to my opinion, let it be proved from heaven." Whereupon a heavenly voice declared, "Why are you disputing with Rabbi Eliezer? The halachah is always according to his opinion." But Rabbi Yehoshua stood up and said [quoting Deut. 30:12], "It is not in heaven [i.e., even God cannot enter in to decide the dispute in favor of the minority opinion]." What did he mean by this? Rabbi Yirmiyah explained: "That the Torah was already given from Sinai. We pay no attention to a heavenly voice since You have long since written in the Torah at Mount Sinai, 'After the majority must one incline [Ex. 23:2].'"

...Rabbi Natan then met Elijah and asked him, "What did the Holy One, blessed be he, do in that hour [i.e., when they rejected his Voice in support of Rabbi Eliezer]?" Elijah replied, "God laughed and said, 'My children have defeated me, my children have defeated me.'" (Babylonian Talmud, Bava Metsi'a 59b)

Conclusion

The scholars writing in **JERUSALEM PERSPECTIVE** are primarily concerned with historical questions underlying the synoptic Gospels, and with getting at them through the lens of Jewish culture and languages.

Many things communicated in the **PERSPECTIVE** will clarify questions the reader may have, and will help him understand one passage or another. At times there will be suggestions that may not seem to line up with the text of the canonical books, and for these it may be good to stand in abeyance with Clark Pinnock:

We cannot surrender the liberty in interpretation we treasure and must continue to hope that those hypotheses that truly exalt the truthfulness of the Scriptures will persist and those that denigrate it will become apparent to all. Meanwhile, it is imperative that we not deny to our biblical scholars the freedom they have a right to, the freedom that, in the end, will serve the people of God through the new insights that come out of untrammelled investigation. (*The Scripture Principle* [New York, 1984], p. 143)

The reader will need to sift through suggested interpretations for himself. This is what a Bible translator does as he prepares to translate any passage of the Bible. I would recommend neither haste nor naivete in that judgment. **JP**

"The reader will need to sift through suggested interpretations for himself. This is what a Bible translator does as he prepares to translate any passage of the Bible."

Reconstructing the Words of Jesus



Dr. Ray Pritz is the head of the Bible Society in Israel.

by Ray Pritz

The Bible texts were originally written down in three languages: the Jewish Bible in Hebrew and a bit of Aramaic, and the New Testament in Greek. However, none of the extant manuscripts is the original document written by one of the authors of the books of the Bible. Those first versions have long ago been lost. Fortunately for us, they were painstakingly copied over and over again, and handed down from one generation to the next.

Copying & Translating

When a person copies a document of any length, he is bound to make some mistakes. Even the most skilled scribe may misspell words or skip letters, words or even whole lines. (See "Scribal Errors" on page 9.) As we read the copy, we may be able to see just where a mistake has been made and easily correct it. If we have another copy of the same document to compare with, the job is that much easier. In fact, the more copies we have to compare, the more we can be sure that we are reconstructing the original accurately.

The texts of the Hebrew Bible were not only copied, they were also translated into other languages such as Greek, Latin, Syriac, Coptic and Ethiopic. Another valid way to get an independent picture of the original is to translate these other early versions back into Hebrew. After this has been done, the scholar can compare the results with the Masoretic (traditional) text and other biblical manuscripts such as those found in the Judean Desert caves and the Samaritan Pentateuch.

The printed Hebrew Bible which translators use contains the Masoretic text as its

base, with various alternate readings from other ancient versions cited in footnotes. Because we have dozens of complete or partial manuscripts of this text to compare, we can be quite sure that the readings we choose accurately represent the original.

Biblical Manuscripts

When we come to the New Testament, the situation is many times more certain, for we have more than 5000 manuscripts containing parts or all of the New Testament. Here, however, we do not have one basic text to which we attach variant readings, for no single New Testament text has been preserved the way the Jewish people preserved the Masoretic text of the Hebrew Bible.

Therefore, New Testament textual critics

have spent thousands of hours comparing the many manuscripts and deciding what is the most likely original wording. Because it is a process of selecting the best reading word by word, we call this an "eclectic" text, from the Greek word meaning "to select."

"The texts which translators use are... extremely close to the originals of Moses, Isaiah, Paul and the other Bible writers."

Most of the existing manuscripts agree with the final eclectic text in more than ninety-eight per cent of the wording, but no one of them agrees with it at every point. This is to be expected, since extant manuscripts represent the result of copying over several centuries, with the possible introduction of minor deviations from the original along the way.

We can say that the texts which translators use are, to a high degree of probability, extremely close to the originals of Moses, Isaiah, Paul and the other Bible writers. There is one notable exception to this, however. Remember what we said about the helpfulness of translating other language versions of the Jewish Bible back

into Hebrew to arrive at the original wording. Parts of the synoptic Gospels are also translations of an original or originals. If we keep in mind that Jesus and his disciples and hearers were not speaking Greek but rather Hebrew or Aramaic or both, then we can see that we will only arrive at Jesus' original words by translating the Greek texts of speeches in the synoptic Gospels back into their Semitic original.

Hallelujah

One simple example will suffice to show how this kind of translating would work. In Revelation 19, the Greek text four times uses the word ἀλληλουιά (*hallēlouia*), which is in fact a simple transliteration of the Hebrew הלל לה (ha-le-lu-YAH, hallelujah).

Some of our modern translations here read "Praise the Lord." They have recognized the Hebrew behind the Greek and have translated it rather than leaving the transliteration. No New Testament translation to date, however, has attempted to apply this principle to the words of Jesus in the Gospels.

The only exception to this is the word "amen." The Greek has transliterated the Hebrew אָמֵן (*ʾa-MEN*) as ἀμήν (*amēn*), a meaningless combination of letters in Greek. English translators, recognizing the Hebrew, have generally not followed the Greek in transliterating "amen" but have given an approximate translation of the Hebrew — "verily" or "truly" (see "אָמֵן — Amen: Introduction or Response," *JP* 1.3 [December 1987]). **JP**

~~Scribal~~ Scribal Errors

There are about 1500 scribal errors in the Hebrew Scriptures. The letters ו (vav) and י (yod), for instance, were often confused by ancient copyists of the Bible. The two letters are so similar that they are easily confused. In fact, writing by mistake a vav instead of a yod or vice versa is the most common scribal error.

The only difference between the Hebrew personal pronouns for "he" and "she" is the middle letter yod or vav. Confusion of vav and yod often resulted in a copying mistake, the writing of הוּ (hu, he) instead of הִי (hi, she) and vice versa. If, for instance, an earlier scribe happened to make the letter י (yod) of הִי (hi, she) a little too long, then the scribe who next copied that text might mistakenly read the הִי as הוּ (hu, he) (e.g., I Kgs. 17:15, Job 31:11, Is. 30:33). Or, conversely, if a scribe made the ו (vav) of הוּ a little too short, then the next copyist might read the הוּ as הִי (e.g., I Kgs. 17:15, I Chron. 29:16, Job 31:11, Ps. 73:16, Eccl. 5:8). Usually the mistake is obvious because the rest of the grammatical forms in the sentence are in the opposite gender. However, scribes were not permitted to alter the sacred text, even if they detected an obvious mistake. They could correct the mistake only by writing the correct spelling in the margin of the manuscript.

These scribal errors are rarely noted in English versions of the Bible. Translators are so sure the marginal readings are correct they usually do not even mention in a footnote that they are not actually translating the consonantal text. Proverbs 23:31, for example, is usually translated, "Do not look at wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup...." English Bible translations are unanimous in rendering "cup" (כוס, *kos*), a marginal reading, even though the text itself reads כִּס (kis, purse; bag).

Another common scribal error is the writing of לוֹ (lo, no) for לוֹ (lo, his) or vice versa (about twenty times in Scripture, e.g., Lev. 11:21, I Sam. 2:16, Ezra 4:2, Is. 49:5). Although these two words are spelled differently, both are pronounced exactly the same way. The most famous example of this scribal error is that found in Psalms 100:3, which the *King James Version* translates as, "Know ye that the Lord he is God: it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves." The consonantal text of the second part of this verse reads: "He has made us לוֹ (ve-LO, and not) we." However, if one translates according to the scribal correction לוֹ (ve-LO, and his) in the margin, one gets, "He has made us and his we are." Therefore, the *Revised Standard Version* renders, "Know that the Lord is God! It is he that made us, and we are his." And the *New International Version* follows closely with, "Know that the Lord is God. It is he who made us, and we are his." Both translations render the marginal correction rather than the apparent error in the preserved text.

II Chronicles 11:18 also contains a scribal error, "And Rehoboam married Mahalath the son of Jerimoth...." Somehow, as the text was copied generation after generation, a scribe substituted בֶּן (ben, son) for בַּת (bat, daughter). Perhaps this happened because of the similarity of the two words or because the scribe's eye jumped to the word "son" two words later in the text. The scribal correction bat (daughter) in the margin is certainly the more original reading. Only if we assume that Rehoboam married a man is it possible to hold that there is not an error in the transmitted text.

— David Bivin

New Testament Canon

by Ray Pritz

When discussing the question of inspiration of Scripture, it is important to consider also the way in which the church determined which books were from God and which were not. Most of us take for granted that the New Testament always had twenty-seven books. We may be vaguely aware that Paul mentions a letter he wrote to the church in Laodicea (Col. 4:16) and that there might have been a third letter to the church in Corinth, but beyond that we assume there were no other writings.

In fact, the writing of the books included in the New Testament was spread over a period of more than half a century. However, not all of these books were accepted by the churches as coming from God until about three hundred years after they were written. During that period there were other books, written roughly at the same time as the twenty-seven New Testament books, which were accepted by some churches as inspired.

One of the earliest acknowledgments that parts of what we now call the New Testament were to be considered as holy Scripture alongside the Hebrew Bible comes in the words of Peter, when he sets writings of Paul together with "Scripture," in other words the Hebrew Bible: "...just as our dear brother Paul wrote to you, using the wisdom that God gave him.... There are some difficult things in his letters which ignorant and unstable people explain falsely, as they do with other passages of the Scriptures" (II Pet. 3:15-16).

First Lists

The first actual attempt to draw up a list of books to be accepted was made by a man named Marcion in the middle of the second century A.D. Marcion, under the influence of gnostic teaching, rejected the idea that the God of the Hebrew Bible could be the same as the God and Father of Jesus. The Jewish God, he said, was a God of wrath and judgment, while the God revealed by Jesus is a God of love and compassion. Following this essentially anti-Semitic idea, Marcion rejected all of the Jewish Scriptures. He then accepted as truly inspired and authoritative only the writings of Paul (ten books, not including the letters to Timothy and Titus) and the bulk of the book

of Luke. Because he believed that Jesus only **appeared** to be a man and to suffer (a view known as Docetism), he rejected the first two chapters of Luke which speak of the birth of Jesus. Marcion was declared a heretic even in his own lifetime.

By the end of the second century there was wide (but not yet universal) acceptance of all but four of the books which make up our New Testament. The so-called Muratorian Fragment dates from that time and omits Hebrews, James and I and II Peter. The eastern and Egyptian churches were also slow to accept II and III John, Jude and Revelation. The name "New Testament," describing the apostolic books of the church, was first used in about 193 A.D. by an unknown author writing against the heresy of Montanism.

Even as late as the early fourth century, the church historian Eusebius was able to point out that books like the Shepherd of Hermas, Didache and the Epistle of Barnabas were accepted by some churches, while books like Jude, II Peter, Revelation and Hebrews were omitted by some (*Ecclesiastical History* III, 25). This situation is indeed reflected in some extant ancient manuscripts. For example, the Peshitta (Syriac), which dates from the fourth or fifth century A.D., omits II Peter, II and III John, Jude and Revelation.

Final Canon

It was not until the year 367 A.D. that the Alexandrian bishop Athanasius listed the twenty-seven books which we now accept as the New Testament canon. The word "canon" derives from the Semitic root meaning a reed (*kaneh*) as a unit or standard of measure (cf. Ezek. 40:5). It was first applied to a set of biblical writings in the fourth century. Up until that time there had been no council or committee which sat down to decide which books were to be accepted by the whole church and which were not. The process was an organic one stretching over that period of 300 years. The main factors which ultimately determined whether a book was to be placed in the "New Testament" were 1) having been written by an apostolic figure, and 2) acceptance by long usage among the churches.

In certain respects, the process which led to the fixing of the canon is one of the out-

(continued on page 15)

Did Jesus Wear a Kippah?

by Shmuel Safrai

It is certain that Jesus, a Jew residing in the land of Israel in the first century, did not wear a *kippah* or skullcap. This custom arose in Babylonia between the third and fifth centuries C.E. among the non-Jewish residents — Jewish residents of Babylonia had not yet adopted this custom, as the Dura-Europos frescoes show — and passed from there to the Jewish community of Europe.

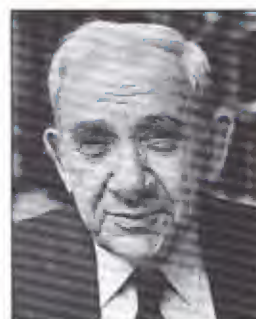
Although priests wore a *מגבש* (*mig-BA'at*, a turban-like headdress (Ex. 28:4, 40; Lev. 8:13), other Jews of the Second Temple period did not wear a headcovering. This is confirmed both by the literature and archaeological remains of the period. For instance, the reliefs on the Arch of Titus in Rome, which depict the victory procession in Rome following the conquest of Jerusalem in 70 C.E., show the Jewish captives bareheaded. Likewise, the frescoes of the mid-third century C.E. synagogue excavated at Dura-Europos represent all the Jewish men as bareheaded except for Aaron the priest.

Contemporary Jewish sources verify the picture presented in the New Testament: "Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head. And every

woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head — it is just as though her head were shaved.... A man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man" (I Cor. 11:4–7).

According to the Babylonian Talmud, Nedarim 30^b, Jewish children were always bareheaded, men sometimes covered their heads and sometimes did not, while women covered their heads at all times. But it must be remembered that this is a late source (end of fifth century C.E.) and reflects Jewish practice in Babylonia.

According to the Shulhan Arukh, the sixteenth-century code of Jewish law compiled by Rabbi Joseph Karo, one should not walk bareheaded even four cubits (two meters) (Orah Hayyim 2:6). This ruling is derived from the Babylonian Talmud, Kiddushin 31^a, where it is stated that Rav Huna (fourth century C.E.), the son of Rav Yehoshua, would not walk bareheaded four cubits (cf. Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 118^b). However, this is noted as the exceptional practice of a particular sage, not as a practice observed by all males. The practice of covering one's head in public apparently was not yet wide-spread in Babylonia in the fourth century C.E. **JP**



Shmuel Safrai is professor of Jewish History at the Hebrew University. With his vast knowledge of rabbinic and secular material of the Second Temple period, he is uniquely qualified to answer many of the questions posed by readers of the Gospels. In this column he presents some of his insights into the Jewish background to the Gospels.



Samuel anointing David, as depicted on a panel of the frescoes that covered the west wall of the mid-third century C.E. synagogue at Dura-Europos.

(Reproduced from Carl H. Kraeling, The Excavations at Dura-Europos, The Synagogue (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1956), Plate LXVI.)

The Sweetness of Learning

Although the Gospels give little information concerning Jesus' childhood, we can suppose that in his formative years Jesus received a good Jewish education. Professor Wilson gives us a glimpse into the Jewish way of training a child.



Marvin R. Wilson is the Harold J. Ockenga Professor of Biblical and Theological Studies at Gordon College in Wenham, Massachusetts. He worked for eight years as a translator and editor of the New International Version of the Bible, and has contributed notes to the NIV Study Bible. Four of his books deal with the relationship between Christianity and Judaism.

by Marvin R. Wilson

One of the most frequently quoted biblical texts dealing with education is Proverbs 22:6: "Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it."

The Hebrew verb translated "train" is **נָחַךְ** (*ha-NAK*). In the Bible this verb and its derivatives occur mainly in contexts suggesting the sense of "to begin, initiate, inaugurate."¹ For example, the root is used for the formal opening of a building (Solomon's Temple, 1 Kgs. 8:63), for an initiation gift for an altar (Num. 7:10), and for the time one begins to live in a new house (Deut. 20:5). Since cult sacrifices, consecration rites or prayers were often connected with the inauguration of a structure, the meaning "to dedicate" eventually became extended to *ha-NAK*.

Hanukkah

This rendering, though not inherent in the root itself, accounts for *Hanukkah* being translated in John 10:22 as "Feast of Dedication."² The *New English Bible*, following this apparent root-meaning of "begin," renders Proverbs 22:6: "Start a boy on the right road" (cf. NIV margin, "Start").

In practice over the centuries, however, it is evident that the Jewish community understood *ha-NAK* as derived from a different root. The verb has customarily been linked with a root meaning "rub the palate or gums"; hence the cognate **נָחַךְ** (*hek*, palate, roof of the mouth, gums).³ The Semitic scholar T.H. Gaster states that the original meaning is suggested by the Arab custom of smearing date juice on the gums and palates of newborn children. He also points out that Calvin, the sixteenth-century reformer, indicates that the Jews of his time used to apply honey in a similar way.⁴

Ezekiel's Scroll

Whatever the etymology of *ha-NAK*, the custom of using honey deserves special

mention in any study of Jewish education. Rabbinic tradition informs us that it was the Jewish practice to use honey in a special ceremony on the first day of school. The young child was shown a slate which had written on it the letters of the alphabet, two verses of Scripture (Lev. 1:1, Deut. 33:4), and one other sentence: "The Torah will be my calling." The teacher next read these words to the child, and the child repeated them back. Then his slate was coated with honey, which he promptly licked off, being reminded of Ezekiel, who said after eating the scroll, "I ate it; and it tasted as sweet as honey in my mouth" (Ezek. 3:3). After this ceremony, the child was given sweet cakes to eat with Bible verses from the Torah written on them.⁵

What is the reason the rabbis tie study and honey together? The answer appears to be due, at least in part, to the linguistic connection they made between the use of *hek* (palate, gums) and *ha-NAK* (to educate) in certain biblical texts. The rabbis found *hek* in passages comparing the sweetness of honey to the sweetness of the wisdom and words of God which one spiritually ingests.

Two passages are of special note: "Eat honey, my son, for it is good; honey from the comb is sweet to your taste [*hek*]. Know also that wisdom is sweet to your soul" (Prov. 24:13-14a); "How sweet are your words to my taste [*hek*], sweeter than honey to my mouth!" (Ps. 119:103). In addition, the Midrash states that the study of Torah "is compared to milk and honey; just as these are sweet throughout, so are the words of the Torah, as it says, 'Sweeter also than honey' [Ps. 19:10]" (Song of Songs Rabbah 1:2, 3). Thus, in the rabbis' view, education came to involve the task of causing people to enjoy the sweetness of studying divine truth.

One other major point is in order before leaving Proverbs 22:6, "Train a child in the way he should go." Today, this text is frequently taken to be a command directed to parents, an exhortation for them to

instruct their child in Scripture and in the way of godly living. Although the Bible gives a mandate for parental instruction of children,⁶ the above proverb does not appear to be one of those texts.

A Child's Uniqueness

The Hebrew of Proverbs 22:6 is **תֵּן לְיֶלֶד הַנּוֹךְ לַנַּחֲאָר עַל פִּי דַרְכּוֹ** (*ha-NOK la-NA'ar 'al pi dar-KO*), literally, "Train [start] a child according to his [the child's] way." There is a great difference between the training of a child according to the **child's** way (i.e., encouraging him to start on the road that is right for him), and training him according to a way chosen, prescribed and imposed by the parents. The former is in keeping with the child's unique God-given bent, disposition, talents and gifts. It is considerate of the uniqueness of the child; it does not treat all developing personalities the same.

The above translation and interpretation put the onus on the child to choose the right path. It is one thing for a parent to encourage, nurture, guide and inform a child so that the child **himself** is prepared to choose the path that is right for him; it is something else for a parent to choose that path for the child. This point is the crux to understanding this verse. Again, we must emphasize that this rendering does not negate the parents' role as teachers of biblical tradition. But it does provide some additional insight into the Hebrew educational process which, parenthetically, corresponds well with certain modern schools of progressive education.

The "training" process begins by seeking to conform the subject matter and teaching methods to the particular personality, needs, grade level and stage in life of the child. (The word *NA'ar*, "child," in Proverbs 22:6 does not necessarily mean infant or small boy; its more than two hundred occurrences in the Bible reveal a wide range of meanings from childhood to maturity.) Thus, the ability of a "child" to exercise more and more his individual freedom by personal choice — albeit one informed by his parents — is certainly not ruled out.

A Tall Order

By way of application, the above understanding of Proverbs 22:6 places a special responsibility upon every parent. The parent must carefully observe each child and seek to provide opportunities for each child's creative self-fulfillment. In addition, the parent must be sensitive to the direc-

tion in life to which the child would naturally conform, for it is only by walking in **that** path that the child will come to realize his God-given potential and find his highest fulfillment.

Elizabeth O'Connor effectively grasps how this proverb may apply: "Every child's life gives forth hints and signs of the way that he is to go. The parent that knows how to mediate, stores these hints and signs away and ponders over them. We are to treasure the intimations of the future that the life of every child gives to us so that, instead of unconsciously putting blocks in his way, we help him to fulfill his destiny. This is not an easy way to follow. Instead of telling our children what they should do and become, we must be humble before their wisdom, believing that in them and not in us is the secret that they need to discover."⁷

This is a tall order. But when parents see that their responsibility is primarily to facilitate, to teach the **child** to choose the right path, only then will the child be enabled to "fulfill his destiny." And herein lies an important educational key to making learning a sweet and palatable adventure. **JP**

1. See S.C. Reif, "Dedicated to Hnkh," *Vetus Testamentum* 22 (1972), 495–501. See also Victor P. Hamilton, "hānak," in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, ed. R. Laird Harris, et al. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), 1:301–302.

2. The Hebrew noun **הִנָּח** (*ha-nu-KAH*) is properly a rite of inauguration, an event often associated with joyful celebration and sacrifice. Thus the word is most often used in reference to the ceremony of "dedication" or "consecration" of some structure. The origin of the Jewish holiday Hanukkah goes back to the 25th of the month Kislev, 165 B.C., when the Maccabees rededicated the Temple after Antiochus IV Epiphanes had desecrated it.

3. Brown, Driver and Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (London: Oxford University Press, 1907), p. 335.

4. Theodor H. Gaster, *Customs and Folkways of Jewish Life* (New York: William Sloane Associates Publishers, 1955), p. 14.

5. For further details of this procedure see William Barclay, *Educational Ideals in the Ancient World*, (repr. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1974), pp. 12–13.

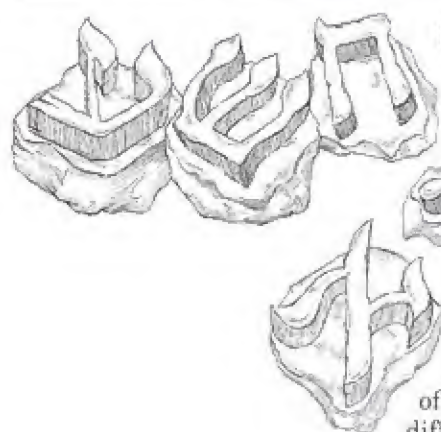
6. See Deut. 4:9, 6:7, 11:19; Ps. 78:5–6; Prov. 1:8; Eph. 6:4.

7. Elizabeth O'Connor, *Eighth Day of Creation* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1971), p. 18.

Adapted from *Our Father Abraham: Jewish Roots of the Christian Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. and Dayton, OH: Center for Judaic-Christian Studies, 1989), pp. 291–294, and used by permission.

Grace Compared

Our previous lesson introduced the Hebrew letters that make up **חֶסֶד** (*HE-sed*), and we looked at other words these letters allowed us to read. In this lesson we take a closer look at the word *HE-sed* itself, and compare its use in Jewish and Christian Bibles.



by David Bivin

Grace seems to be plentiful in the New Testament but rare in the Hebrew Scriptures. Many Christians have gained the false impression that the God of the Jewish Bible is typically a God of wrath, while the God of the New Testament — almost a different God — is a God of love.

This impression is strengthened by such New Testament statements as “The law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ” (John 1:17). Is God’s grace more prevalent in the New Testament than in the Jewish Scriptures? The answer is no, but the explanation of how this perception gained acceptance among Christians is complicated.

HE-sed and *hen*

חֶסֶד (*HE-sed*, goodness, kindness; grace) appears 247 times in the Bible. The Septuagint, the second-century B.C. Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures, nearly always rendered *HE-sed* as *ἔλεος* (*eleos*, mercy). English versions of the Bible have followed the Septuagint’s lead and rendered *HE-sed* as “mercy.”

On the other hand, **יָן** (*hen*, beauty, loveliness), the word which in Christian translations of the Hebrew Scriptures has traditionally been rendered “grace,” appears only sixty-nine times in Scripture, and forty of these occurrences are the Hebrew idiom “find grace in the eyes of.” What Christians think of when they read the word “grace” is something close to the sense that *HE-sed* carries, that is, God’s unmerited favor. What they usually do not have in mind when they read the English

word “grace” in the Bible is its ordinary sense of “charm, beauty.”

Therefore, since the noun *HE-sed*, which appears frequently in the Hebrew Scriptures, is translated “mercy,” and the noun *hen*, which appears infrequently, is translated “grace,” the impression is gained that there is little grace in the Hebrew Scriptures. “Grace” appears just thirty-nine times in the “Old Testament” of the *King James Version*. “Grace” is even rarer in more recent English versions of the Hebrew Scriptures: the *Revised Standard Version*, for instance, uses the word “grace” only seven times in translating the Hebrew Bible.

By contrast, the word “grace” appears frequently in the New Testament. The *King James Version* uses the word 129 times in its translation of the New Testament; the *Revised Standard Version* uses it 120 times in its New Testament. Since the New Testament is approximately one-fifth the size of the Hebrew Scriptures, the word “grace” is seventeen to eighty-five times more frequent in the New Testament than in the “Old Testament” in Christian translations of the Bible to English.

“Grace” as Mercy

There was a phenomenon that contributed to this distortion. Towards the end of the period in which the Hebrew Scriptures were written, *HE-sed* lost its distinctiveness and came very near in meaning to *hen*, normally translated by **חָרִים** (*charis*, charm, grace; favor) in the Septuagint. Thus in the later books of the Hebrew Scriptures, the translators of the Septuagint tended to use **חָרִים** to render *HE-sed*.

In the New Testament this tendency became full-blown, and *charis* usually appears in the sense of “mercy.” In spite of this change of meaning, English versions of Scripture continued to render *charis* woodenly as “grace.” Therefore, the reader of the

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The Jerusalem School of Synoptic Research (מכון ירושלים לחקר האוונגליזם הסנופטי) is a consortium of Jewish and Christian scholars who are examining the synoptic Gospels within the context of the language and culture in which Jesus lived. Their work confirms that Jesus was a Jewish sage who taught in Hebrew and used uniquely rabbinic teaching methods.

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The Jerusalem School was registered in Israel as a non-profit research institute in 1985. Its members are Prof. David Flusser, Dr. Robert L. Lindsey, Prof. Shmuel Safrai, David Bivin, Dr. Randall J. Buth, Dr. Weston W. Fields, Dr. R. Steven Notley, Dwight A. Pryor, Halvor Ronning, Mirja Ronning, Prof. Chana Safrai and Prof. Bradford H. Young.

